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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SY](#) [LE](#) [EG](#) [IR](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: SYRIAN VP VISITS EGYPT, SAUDI, AND IRAN

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Stephen A. Seche for reasons
1.4 b/d

¶1. (U) Syrian VP Farouk al-Shara'a met with Egypt's President Mubarak March 23 in Sharm El Sheikh, Saudi King Abdullah March 24 in Jeddah, and Iranian President Ahmadinejad March 25 in Tehran. In his first regional trip since becoming VP, Shara'a delivered to each leader a letter from Syrian President Bashar al-Asad and discussed the upcoming Arab League (AL) summit in Khartoum, Syria's bilateral relations with each respective country, and developments in Lebanon, Iraq and Palestine, according to media reports. In Egypt, Shara'a downplayed to reporters the idea that his discussions with Mubarak had focused on steps to improve Syria's relationship with Lebanon, despite the fact that Lebanese PM Siniora met earlier in the day with Mubarak.

¶2. C) Egyptian DCM Ashraf Hamdy told Charge March 26 that Shara'a sought support for Syria's position at the AL summit. When asked what that entailed, Hamdy said the Syrians wanted a statement of support at the summit opposing the sanctions being imposed on Syria, in particular the recent 311 sanctions on the Syria Commercial Bank. According to Hamdy, the Syrians are more worried about the impact of those sanctions than they are letting on in public. (Note: On March 26, the official Syrian Arab News Agency quoted Syria's FM Walid Muallim as saying that foreign ministers would send the AL a draft resolution condemning sanctions against Syria and calling on Washington to lift them.) Shara'a also sought Mubarak's support for raising this sanctions issue at the meeting in May of Western finance ministers with their Arab counterparts in Sharm, where terrorist financing would be discussed, according to Hamdy. (Note: We presume this meeting refers to the World Economic Forum on the Middle East May 20-22 in Sharm El Sheikh.)

¶3. (C) Al Hayat correspondent Ibrahim Hamidi said March 26 that Shara'a had several goals for his trip to Egypt and Saudi Arabia. First, Shara'a sought Egyptian and Saudi help to persuade other Arab countries to refrain from calling for improved Syria-Lebanon relations, Hamidi said. The SARG wants the Lebanese national dialogue to conclude with a set of recommendations before Syria enters into talks with Lebanon, Hamidi said. Second, the SARG wanted to coordinate with Egypt and Saudi Arabia on an Arab financial aid agreement for the incoming Palestinian government, Hamidi said. Third, Shara'a wanted to elicit Arab support for an Arab League statement supporting Syria against U.S. pressure and calling for the easing of sanctions, Hamidi stated. Fourth, Shara'a sought to have dropped from the summit's agenda a proposal to send Arab forces to Iraq, said Hamidi

without elaboration. Finally, by ending Shara'a's regional tour with a stop in Tehran, the VP sought to underscore the SARG's ability to operate in the middle ground between Egypt and Saudi Arabia on one hand and Iran on the other, Hamidi asserted.

14. (C) When asked whether Shara'a's travel indicated continued or increased influence over the SARG's foreign policy, Hamidi responded that he saw the trip rather as a sign of a shift in Shara'a's role. In the past, former Syrian VP Khaddam had played the role of the "bad cop" by advocating hard-line positions within the SARG, while Shara'a delivered a relatively more moderate message, Hamidi asserted. Now, Shara'a has assumed the "bad cop" role by playing a lead role on the Iran file, while new FM Walid Mu'allim delivers more moderate messages aimed at the West and its allies, such as those he delivered in his mid-March meeting with UN Special Envoy Terje Roed Larsen in Moscow and in late March to Qatar's Emir, Hamidi stated.

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